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## THEOSOPHY AND ETHICS.

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FEW systems of thought have been more widely misunderstood and misrepresented than that known as Theosophy. Only within the last few years have people begun to realize that the Theosophical Society and the philosophy so many of its members adhere to must be taken into serious account as important factors in the moulding of modern thought. The newspapers, though now we number many warm supporters among them, and receive intelligent consideration from nearly all, were formerly of the belief that Theosophists exclusively concerned themselves with weird phenomena, and reporters felt it at once their privilege and pleasure to make extravagant "copy" out of theosophical commonplace. John Stuart Mill well said that "all reforms have to pass through three stages, viz., ridicule, argument, and adoption." Theosophy has won its way well into the second stage, with the growing certainty of attaining the third at no distant future.

It was thought to be something new, to be but another invention of this peculiarly inventive age. Further acquaintance showed that theosophy, a word meaning Divine Wisdom, was older than history, and that its nineteenth century exponents laid particular stress upon its immense antiquity, asserting that they were merely repeating that which the sages of every race and age had invariably taught. They further made it clear that instead of pursuing the uncanny and extraordinary, they were studying the nature of man and the universe, taking the sacred books and philosophical treatises of the world as their text-books, and, by way of propaganda, were trying to remind the humanity of to-day of long forgotten truths which harmonized with all true religion, science, and philosophy.

Ignorant people in every century have hastily concluded that they and their contemporaries were hugely superior to their forbears. There are many persons in this generation who consider Rider Haggard, whom they have read, the superior of Shakespeare, whom they have not read; Professor Huxley a greater light than Plato; Henry Ward Beecher a more brilliant representative of religion than old Martin Luther, or Ananda, the beloved disciple of Gautama, or Shankaracarya, of whom they have probably never heard at all. The tendency of every historical epoch has been to glorify itself at the expense of its predecessors, and recent advances in the physical sciences have done much to accentuate this very human habit. Fortunately, there are always exceptions to such rules, and a few thinking people, among them the Theosophists, have ventured to ask if it be not possible that man himself has been overlooked in this present universal analysis of all visible things; if it be not reasonable to suppose that the ancients—who professed to study themselves rather than the phenomena around them—may have gathered information of vital importance, concerning their own states of consciousness at any rate, which would be both instructive and helpful if placed at the disposal of mankind to-day?

Man soon wearies of new fads and fancies. The worship of matter has already ceased to be fashionable. It is only unchanging truth that holds man's interest to the end. He may turn from it, may devote his mind and heart to transitory sensations, but sooner or later and often unknowingly, he returns to his everlasting search for truth and wisdom. The only conceivable object of life is to learn how to live, and those who reject this theory of life and seek pleasure or knowledge even, without regard to results, are learning their lessons just the same. There are some children who will never believe that fire burns until they have scorched their fingers.

Many are beginning to realize that the science of right living is worthy of the deepest attention, and, as a result, the orthodox systems of ethics are being discarded as unsatisfactory. These systems may be roughly classified under two categories: first, the dogmatic system, common to all religions, which asserts that certain moral laws should be obeyed because they are the laws of God, revealed in some sacred book; and second, the utilitarian system,

which consists in formulating various rules of conduct which should be followed if man desires to do his duty by his fellows and by future generations.

The dogmatic system is evidently faulty, as its effectiveness depends upon the faith of the individual in some particular Book of Revelations and his anticipation of either reward or punishment in the future, or upon his religious devotion to the unseen law-giver. Further, in every instance, such books are contradictory, as in the case of the Christian Bible, which in one place maintains the Mosaic doctrine of an "eye for an eye"—the doctrine of revenge—and in another, while "endorsing the law and the prophets," breathes a spirit of divine love and forgiveness. This autocratic and arbitrary system is repugnant to free reason and consistent self-respect. Thinking people will not blindly accept the *ipse dixit* of book or teacher. They want to know the rational basis of any particular declaration or injunction, they wish to understand the operation and effect of the ethical and moral systems inculcated; and only if their reason and intuition agree in endorsing these will they give unqualified assent to both precept and practice.

It is on that account that the utilitarian system has also proved itself unsatisfactory. Based upon a study of physical nature and of history, certain generalizations are made in regard to actions deemed most likely to help forward the evolution of the race. It is virtually said: "If you desire to assist your fellows, and as fathers and mothers help instead of hinder the progress of future generations, you should do so and so, and should abstain from acts of such and such a nature." But this requires the sacrifice of immediate pleasures for the sake of a remote posterity, and as most people are selfish they are apt to reply that unborn races may be interesting in theory, but are sufficiently impalpable in fact to be conveniently ignored, and in any case will have opportunity to look out for themselves. They do not see how they personally are to be benefited by conforming to these ethical injunctions, and, until they do, prefer to continue as at present. Others, again, ask what is to be the end of it all. They have heard that this earth must sooner or later cease to exist, perhaps by a process of solar cremation, perhaps as the result of complete glacialization, involving in both cases the extinction of man. For the fol-

lowers of the utilitarian system do not as a rule consider man as much more than a wonderful piece of mechanism ; they do not generally believe in the immortality of the soul, and if they do, have only the haziest possible conception of that soul's future. It is not to be wondered at that people refuse to be satisfied with such make-shifts and demand some philosophy of life, which, while in perfect harmony with all that is true in modern scientific teachings, will not antagonize their religious sentiment and intuition.

This philosophy of life and scheme of the universe are contained in Theosophy. In order to understand it there is no absolute necessity to accept the well-known theosophical doctrines of Reincarnation and the law of Compensation, though they are quite logical and certainly throw additional light on all the problems that await our solution, on the problem of universal justice above all others. I shall endeavor to show that apart from these most ancient teachings, Theosophy provides a basis for ethics which is impregnable. Certain fundamental propositions must be granted, and will readily be granted by the vast majority of thinking people. These fundamental propositions are :

(1.) The universality of law, and the essential unity of nature.

This implies that nature is one harmonious whole, including the physical, etheric, mental, moral, spiritual, and any other existing worlds. It denies the necessity of dividing the universe arbitrarily into two water-tight compartments, one to be known as the natural world, the other as the supernatural, pointing out that no one has as yet succeeded in discovering the limits of nature. It condemns as illogical the relegation of all mysteries to the compartment labelled supernatural. It finds law everywhere and asserts that an actual law of nature must operate uniformly and consistently, not spasmodically and arbitrarily.

(2.) The power of thought to affect and mould matter.

The statement of this proposition purposely excludes any consideration of the origin of thought. It leaves ample margin for the indisputable influence of matter upon thought, though this influence is commonly retarding or negative in character. It needs no faith for its acceptance, as it is a matter of common knowledge that the thought of the mother may act with dynamic

effect upon the unborn child in direct proportion to the thought's intensity. In addition to this, hypnotism has finally demonstrated the power of mind over matter. Montegazza states that he was able to induce local reddening of the skin by simply thinking intently of the spot. Delboeuf says that he can influence the secretion of saliva by his will or ideas. Focachon is recorded to have hypnotized a subject, and after placing a postage stamp on the shoulder and covering it with a bandage, suggested this was a blister. "The subject was watched carefully and after twenty hours the skin was found thickened and dead, of a yellowish-white color, the region puffy and surrounded by an intensely red zone." The blister was photographed. Charcot and others have been too frequently quoted to the same effect to require recital here. Explain it as you will, postulate the existence of some intermediary such as the ether or "astral light" between mind and gross matter—the facts remain and continue to be recorded. The simplest proof of any, and one easily verified by experience, is this: A patient with excruciating toothache, if his attention be suddenly and strongly attracted to some other subject—such as the burning of the house in which he is at the time—will instantly forget his pain and will not feel it again until his attention relaxes from this dominant impression. And who does not know that a man's thought will mould his face, ennobling it or making his features sinister and forbidding? In the face of an old man one can read the record of his life.

As subsidiary to this second proposition it should be granted that all actions performed by man originate in his mind. This is clearly the case in deliberate acts, and is as clearly true of so-called automatic actions, once Lamarck's biological axiom is taken into account that function precedes organism and that of necessity desire precedes function. In other words, actions which have now become automatic arose in the first place from desire and may be said to have been originally deliberate.

Applying this subsidiary proposition to ethics, it will be seen that every evil act originates in an evil thought; that the same is true of good acts, and it therefore follows that while right and wrong actions are matters of vital importance, it will be sufficient to study and master the science of right thought in order to insure the performance of right and wise actions. This, in itself,

is an entire reversion of the modern method, which concerns itself largely with visible results, but which cares little for the concealed thought and motive. Even the ten commandments deal almost entirely with actions; but, not content with what might be called the materialism of these ordinances, the nineteenth century has erected unto itself another and greater commandment than any of them—"Thou shalt not be found out!" So long as that unwritten law is obeyed, the rest are of small account. The drawback is that the experts in wickedness are less likely to be found out than the tyros! But anything more hopelessly immoral than such a conception of "what is proper" cannot be conceived. It results inevitably, however, from that jealous consideration of appearances and the comparative carelessness as to the well-spring of action which exists in the mind of every man and woman. The inductive method has been followed for so long that causes are almost totally disregarded and effects reign supreme.

Theosophists, at any rate, believe in the Biblical teaching that to think a sin is to commit it, *de facto*, if not *de jure*. They concern themselves primarily with the laws of thought. They avail themselves of all that is best in the two other systems which have been briefly reviewed above. Instead, however, of taking one revealed book as their criterion of truth, they take the sacred literature of the world, and recognizing that their authors were in a very real sense "professors" of ethics, they treat them as they would treat authorities on chemistry, if they were studying that science. They collate the various conclusions arrived at, compare and classify them, and then proceed to verify for themselves the general result in this way obtained. In studying chemistry it would be manifestly absurd to confine one's self to a single text-book; in studying ethics it is evidently wiser to take and compare the conclusions of Krishna, Confucius, Lao-tsze, Buddha, Zoroaster, Plato, Moses, Jesus, Paul, Mohammed, and others, than to limit one's observation to a single representative, who at best taught people of a certain type of mind, for which he must have made constant allowance, in this way deliberately confining his instruction to the special needs and understanding of his hearers. Jesus, for instance, taught the Hebrews, who at that time were not a metaphysical race by any means, nor one capable of subtle distinctions in the domain of

thought. Gautama Buddha, on the other hand, attempted to reform and purify Hinduism, and had to deal with some of the subtlest metaphysicians the world has ever seen. He also spoke to the common people, and all know with what success; but the common people of India are born philosophers, even to this day of their comparative degradation. Necessarily Jesus and Gautama differed in their expression of the truth, but close attention to their respective doctrines shows that truth to them was the same.

Following this preliminary study of conclusions arrived at by great sages will come verification by means of history. The experience of generations of men will probably confirm these conclusions, but as this process has been frequently exploited, and its value is generally overestimated, there is no need to dwell upon it at any length. It does not bring conviction to the average mind.

Finally will come the supreme test, that of regulated common-sense. Rules of conduct will be studied in the light of universal laws. Keeping in mind the first proposition, it will be seen readily that any law which we know as holding true in physical nature can also be applied to the world of thought. That Newton's law—action and reaction are equal and opposite—governs the activity of the mind, can hardly be disputed. Everyone knows that following an intense stimulation of any function of the mind, reaction follows of an opposite nature. This is particularly observable of the emotions and with emotional people. A philosopher should be able to lead his own reactions, instead of being led by them; and many people do this without understanding the laws they unconsciously obey. They stop some activity of the mind or emotional nature before it wearies them, and change the current of their thought without difficulty. Others permit themselves to be carried away by some sensation and then by reaction are led, independently of their own wills, into feelings of an opposite or contrasted character.

This illustration helps to demonstrate the fact that thought, to be understood, must be studied as a force. If this be done, many of the ethical teachings of the world's saviors will be scientifically appreciated, though generally classed at the present time as unpractical. People are apt to forget that while a text-book on science becomes *passé* in five or six years, the laws of ethics are

immutable, for they are an unchanging quantity, true—if true in the first place—now and forever. Bishop Magee's famous article discarding many of Christ's precepts as inapplicable to this age conclusively proved that religion as now taught, and considered apart from philosophy, cannot defend its position, and will never be able to do so until religion, science, and philosophy unite once more as so many inseparable aspects of the one truth.

How many modern exponents of religion would dare defend the reasonableness of the doctrine taught by Christ, Buddha, and all the greatest sages, that "hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love"? How many of them would venture to apply this to social and political relationships, to international affairs? They would not be listened to, because they could not justify the faith in them by argument or reason. Yet here we have a direct statement: that hatred, a state of consciousness and therefore a force, can never be stopped by a force of the same nature, but only by love, its opposite. Simple and direct enough, and if true, to be taken into serious account; for if a man can be shown that he defeats his own ends by maintaining any given attitude of mind, he will probably try to change his course and adapt himself to the exigencies of the situation. He knows, for example, that if he wishes to arrest the course of a billiard ball moving from right to left of a table, he cannot do so by driving another ball after it in the same direction; he must meet it with some contrary force, whether by another ball, or by hand or cue, travelling from left to right in a direction opposite to that taken by the ball he wishes to stop. By means of this very ordinary illustration—itself an example of a law governing the whole universe—he is able to realize that hatred's opposite, the force called love, the regenerator, alone can nullify hate, the destroyer. Studying hatred from another point of view, he will be forced to the conclusion that an individual entertaining this sentiment tends to destroy himself. By observing the effect of hatred and anger upon his own organism he will gain sufficient evidence of its disruptive and disorganizing effect. It disturbs, perverts, unbalances both the physical and the intellectual faculties and must certainly affect still more profoundly the ether interpenetrating the whole of his body and brain. It injures himself more than anyone else.

In the same way all unworthy sentiments such as jealousy,

vanity, and the rest, can be shown to be destructive and certain to defeat their own object. Jealousy, as a state of consciousness as a mode of energy, is evidently contractive and separative. Its effect on the physical organism is "withering"; its immediate result is to separate us from our fellows on account of the contraction taking place in our own minds; while love, as an expansive and radiating force, attracts everyone, evokes the love of others in response to our own, particularly if our love be unselfish. This qualification may give rise to a question in regard to the difference between selfish and unselfish love, and as to the greater attractive power of the latter. Selfish love may be compared to a force that goes out in order to bring back something it desires; it demands recognition, reward; it is not content to give, but strives to take. Unselfish love, on the other hand, finds its greatest happiness in bestowing itself freely upon its object, regardless of any return that may or may not be made; it gives, it does not take, though it may receive. It is purely expansive in its action, while selfish love expands but to contract, and is as destructive in the end as jealousy or hatred. The one attracts, the other repels if it does not enslave.

It would be easy to multiply verifications on these lines of almost forgotten ethical doctrines. The teachers of the past were profound observers of cosmic nature as well as of the wonderfully complex workings of the human heart and mind. They taught what they knew, not what they guessed. They spoke from their own experience, not from books. Hence their doctrines, when properly recorded and faithfully transcribed, will bear the most careful analysis and will be found to be statements of law, not the mere moral platitudes which many suppose that they are. As laws of nature, they should be obeyed, for such laws cannot be violated with impunity, and by disregarding them we injure not only ourselves but our nearest and dearest, as well as humanity as a whole. If laws of physical health are ignored we know what the result will be: disease, not confined to ourselves but contagious and likely to affect thousands. Mankind is one, and injury to any of its members must result in injury to all, either directly or indirectly. Laws of moral and mental health, once recognized, require the same unquestioning obedience, for the forces operating in that sphere are more instantaneous in their action and "a weed grows a yard in the night." By means

of the all-penetrating ether, thought is communicated from mind to mind with lightning-like rapidity, affecting all minds responsive to itself for good or ill according to its own character.

In this way the Theosophist is able to meet everyone on his own ground; showing the selfish man that wrong thought will destroy him and defeat his own aims; appealing to the unselfish man on the broader and nobler basis of compassion for his fellow-men, pointing out to him that a thought of anger will find a resting place in any mind where similar thoughts exist—for like attracts like—and that this additional impulse may be sufficient to drive some poor wretch into a crime against which he may have for long struggled bravely. The universal brotherhood of humanity is a truth of terrific proportions; for it involves responsibility for every act we perform, for every thought we generate. The universality of law involves the universal application of the law of cause and effect, and it follows that in the mind as well as in the domain of physics, “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” As inevitably, whatever a man now reaps he must have sown in the past, no matter where or when. Man stands forth as the child of his own past, the moulder of his own future. He is the master of his destiny. Perhaps his greatest crime is lack of faith in himself, but this lack of faith arises from ignorance, and if that be removed man will awake from his long sleep, will claim his birthright, and will take his true position in the universe as a conscious co-operator with nature.

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